

We need ALL the facts, and NOW

[Editor's note: The following letter was read aloud by Clinton Maynard at the meeting of the Community Advisory Group on June 13, 2002.]

On June 6, 2002, I engaged in a communication with a fellow concerned citizen who has been a very good source for credible information. This citizen is not in government or the medical field and doesn't even live here. In our communication, I was informed of some shocking information: This information was that in the past three years there have been 23 cases of mesothelioma diagnosed in Libby. [Mesothelioma is a rare cancer of the lining of the lung and is caused by exposure to tremolite asbestos.]

In disbelief, I sought verification of the accuracy of this information, through EPA, who verified this to be the truth. This means that 23 people in our community in the past three years were told that they have six months to a year to live. Mesothelioma is almost always a terminal cancer. Generally speaking, this diagnosis is a death sentence.

What I also find shocking is that this vital and pertinent information has been withheld from the community.

This parallels our history that produced this tragedy in the first



Montanian photo by David F. Latham

Clinton Maynard, left, reads his letter as fellow CAG member Gary Swenson looks on. See letter on this page.

place — the withholding of vital information from the people. I would like to make myself perfectly clear on this matter, the withholding of vital information in regard to this asbestos issue is in my view, the equivalent of lying.

I would like to know who all was privy to this information, for how long and why this information has been withheld. When the number was 15, I want to know the date. I want to know if this infor-

mation was considered in the recent denial of declaring a public health emergency for Libby. The declaration of a public health emergency would have opened doors for addressing the long-term health care issue, opened doors for research funding and would have ensured that ATSDR [Agency for Toxic Substances and Disease Registry] stayed on board here to finish the work they started.

The fact that this information

had to come to me through the grapevine begs the question, what else are we not being told?

It seems we have a "don't ask, don't tell," "need-to-know basis" in regard to the sharing of information. I find this unacceptable and insulting.

We will not be viewed as a bunch of dumb hicks in Northwest Montana who have no credentials. It was people with credentials who failed to prevent this disaster.

We are the people who are enduring the aftermath, trying to find solutions. We need the information. We need the numbers, we need to know how many cancers and what types, how many immune disorders, how many people are being prescribed medicine for arthritis. It's time we heard the rest of the story. It's time we put this above board and keep it there.

Clinton Maynard, Libby

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